

XLI.—*Letters, Extracts, and Notes.*

THE following letters have been received :—

SIR,—The following may possibly be of sufficient interest for publication in ‘The Ibis.’ Naturalists who have paid some attention to the study of Psittacine birds will be familiar with the handsome Australian Broadtail known as Pennant’s Parrakeet (*Platycercus elegans*), and will be aware that whereas the plumage of the adult is mainly crimson, that of the young is for the most part green, the complete mature dress not being assumed for over a year. For some time past I have been engaged in an attempt to partially acclimatise certain of the *Platycercinæ*, and after a number of failures succeeded this year in inducing a pair of Pennants to nest and rear their young at complete liberty. The latter, to my great surprise, have just left the nest in what is, with the exception of a few greenish feathers on the wing, the full crimson plumage of the adult, a circumstance which appears to me to be most interesting and remarkable. So far as I am aware, Pennants bred in English aviaries have not hitherto shown any abnormality of plumage, and moreover the Port Adelaide Parrakeet (*Platycercus adeluidæ*), a very near relative of the Pennant, has several times bred with me at liberty and never failed to produce young which carried their immature dress (which is very similar to that of the Pennant) for the full natural period.

It is, I believe, held by some authorities that all primitive types of birds were soberly coloured and that a showy dress is first assumed by the male, later by the female, and last of all by the young. One would naturally expect these changes to be extremely gradual, but here apparently we have an instance in which the final change is brought about quite suddenly. It would be interesting to know whether the parents of my young birds were green or red in their first plumage ; but as they were both imported from Australia

when fully adult, this point cannot unfortunately be ascertained.

I am, Sir,
Yours, &c.,
TAVISTOCK.

Woburn Abbey, Woburn.
July 1st, 1914.

SIR,—Mr. Bonhote's and Dr. Ticehurst's letters in regard to my paper on the Moorhen have greatly interested me, and perhaps I may be allowed to make a short reply to some of the points raised. As regards Mr. Bonhote's letter, I freely admit I had not read his article in the 'Field' of March 24, 1906, though I have since looked it up, and I think Mr. Bonhote will agree with me that unlimited time would be required to look up every journal and newspaper to see if anything had been written on any particular subject. Mr. Bonhote's notes about the colour of the bill in winter and summer are of outstanding interest, and I should much like to see the specimens on which he came to these conclusions, as all the *full* adults I have examined or seen taken throughout the twelve months have all had red bills and red eyes, and until I have conclusive evidence to the contrary I must maintain that all Moorhens with olive bills and brown eyes are immature, and I have yet to see a wild specimen in full adult dress (no white on throat or chin, full slaty dress, and pure white flank stripes) with an olive bill.

Speaking without seeing the specimen, I should say that Mr. Bonhote's hen (March 26) was a young bird of the year before (*cf.* my notes *re* second plumage, December, January to April). His July and November notes are of the utmost interest, and I can only suppose that captivity tends to dull the colours of the soft parts in the July birds and that the November ones were possibly the young birds "bred during the season." Mr. Bonhote's wild-killed hen in November is doubtless a second plumage bird, with white throat, which had assumed the adult colouring of the bill rather earlier

than appears to be normal (*cf.* notes *re* second plumage, December to April).

I think Mr. Bonhote is right in thinking the white on the first primary is variable. I agree that we are all liable to be mistaken, and if later Mr. Bonhote and Dr. Ticehurst will allow me to examine their specimens in winter dress and they prove to be adults with olive bills, I am quite prepared to be convinced that my conclusions are incorrect.

I should especially like to examine Dr. Ticehurst's specimens which he mentions as being taken on October 10 and November 18, both of which are in that state of dress, and should have the soft parts as given by me on p. 300 (second plumage). Is not his bird, taken on November 1, in adult dress?

As regards Dr. Ticehurst's letter, he might be interested to know that I showed my "flapper" Moorhens to several ornithologists, who did not recollect having actually seen specimens in that state; anyway, I have not pretended that the fact was new, but that it merely required resurrecting. I note Dr. Ticehurst agrees that the shield increases in size during the breeding-season.

At a meeting of the B. O. C. during this last session, Mr. Witherby exhibited a series of Rooks, the value of which was that they were all taken during one year, and I think that one year's series would more surely fix times of seasonable moults and plumage than odd specimens secured over a long period.

I agree with Dr. Ticehurst that "series from about the same dates of hatching" would be useful, but how to be sure that birds on the wing were all hatched on a certain date is beyond me, and after all, if chicks are hatching from May to July, they would all be moulting into the second plumage between the beginning of September and the middle of November, a period of ten weeks, which allows for about the same ratio of time as May to July;

that is to say, that it could be taken that young birds moulting in September were hatched in May, and those moulting in November were hatched at the beginning of July.

It is to be regretted that ornithologists who knew subjects "for at least a dozen years" do not put more of their knowledge in writing in some recognised scientific journal, so that the time of the student would not be taken up in writing on a subject that is "clearly known to pretty nearly everyone." Unfortunately these subjects are not "clearly known to pretty nearly everyone," and there are not a few misstatements carried over from work to work which could with more careful study and less proneness to copy be put right.

It is my idea to continue these papers, and to describe on the same lines many of the interesting sequences of plumages of our British Birds, many of which have not yet been fully gone into.

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.,

C. H. B. GRANT.

The Sports Club,
St. James' Square,
August 30th, 1914.

SIR,—Referring to the plate which illustrates my paper in the last issue of 'The Ibis' (p. 403), I desire to say that it is not an accurate reproduction of the original drawing which I was responsible for and passed for the artist. The proofs of the plate I refused to pass, but the Editor decided that they were *sufficiently* good. I disclaim, therefore, all responsibility in the matter.

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.,

HENRY O. FORBES.

Redcliffe, Beaconsfield, Bucks.
September 8th, 1914.

[We are sorry that Dr. Forbes was unable to approve of his plate. Owing to the great improvement of the mechanical processes of reproduction of coloured drawings, both by chromolithography and by the various photographic processes, it has become more and more difficult to get plates printed by lithography satisfactorily coloured by hand as was done in previous years. We have, therefore, been endeavouring to reproduce coloured plates by the new mechanical processes. In the case of Dr. Forbes's plate, the first result was admittedly unsatisfactory, and the only way in which the plate could be ready in time for publication was to have each copy touched up by hand. This was done, and to us as well as to the artist the result seemed satisfactory and an accurate representation of the original drawing. We regret that Dr. Forbes was unable to agree with us, and we hope we shall be able to satisfy him on a future occasion.]

The New Edition of the B. O. U. List of British Birds.—Members of the Union will doubtless be pleased to hear that the new List is now complete and all in type. The Committee hope that it will be ready for publication before the end of the present year.

A Correction.—On page 518 of the July number of 'The Ibis,' it is stated that the "so-called Siberian or Thick-billed form (of the Nutcracker), *Nucifraga c. macrorhynchus*, breeds as far west as East Prussia." There is some confusion in regard to this statement; the Siberian Nutcracker (*N. c. macrorhynchus*) is the Slender-billed form, and does not appear to have been recorded breeding west of Siberia, though there have been several "irruptions" of late years

in autumn and winter as far west as England and France.

The European or Thick-billed Nutcracker (*N. c. caryocatactes*) is known to breed in East Prussia as well as in other parts of central Europe. I have to thank Mr. Jourdain for drawing my attention to this misstatement.—W. L. S.